

WASHINGTON REPORT

On Middle East Affairs

Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, August 8, 1983, Page 8

Personality

Allan C. Kellum

Within the journalistic community in Washington, the Middle East impinges in various ways. Journalists abound who will cover the U.S. angle of a Middle East event, but only when something important or exciting happens. A smaller number, mostly correspondents for Middle East publications, will spend just about all of their time on the subject. And of this group, there are a few who tend to specialize in a certain aspect of Middle East coverage. Among them is Allan Kellum, the 37-year old editor and publisher of a twice-monthly, four-page newsletter named *The Mideast Observer*.

Mr. Kellum's specialty within a specialty, during the five years since he established his publication, could be called the "Congressional Connection." Although the newsletter does give some coverage of a variety of official institutions, it devotes most of its space to reporting and analysing what is going on in the U.S. Congress with regard to Middle East issues. It provides its readers with excerpts of transcripts of key Congressional hearings, gives progress reports on legislation, carries profiles of Congressmen who have an impact on Middle East issues, and records votes of individual Senators and Representatives.

"It's important for Americans to know what their elected officials are saying and doing on Mideast policy," Mr. Kellum says. "We just give them the information that will allow them to make up their own minds on who is right or wrong."

Stalking Congress

In his quest, Mr. Kellum spends several hours a week stalking the halls of Congress, tape-recorder in hand—attending hearings, and interviewing Congressional aides. He is also a voracious reader of much of the official material which is published on Capitol Hill, culling it for news of upcoming events and for official voting results.

Mr. Kellum does not have an editorial staff. He is a loner, gathering and writing up all his material on his own. He works out of his house, and it is perhaps just as well that it is located only a gavel's throw away from the Capitol.

Those who subscribe to the final product of Mr. Kellum's solitary labors include government officials, businessmen and academics who are interested enough in Middle

East economic and political issues to want to keep tabs on what Congress is doing about them—if anything. He says that only about one in five of his readers is in the Washington area; a smaller number live abroad; and the rest are scattered around the United States. Mr. Kellum concedes that this list of subscribers is not quite long enough to make him rich, exactly—but that's not why he got into the business. In Allan Kellum you have a man who truly believes in the value to others of what he is doing.

There was little enough in his early life to indicate that he would end up doing what he is doing today, however. After spending his boyhood on an Indiana farm, and then getting a degree from Earlham College in his home state, he became a graduate student in chemistry at Ohio University. His acquaintance with the problems of the Mideast was scant, and the thought of a career in journalism had not even crossed his mind.

Service in Kind

The fates then struck, in 1968, in the form of a notice from his draft board. As a Quaker, Mr. Kellum was a conscientious objector, and could be excused from military service if he put in an equal amount of time in service of another kind. It turned out there was an opening for a math and chemistry teacher at a Quaker-run school in Ramallah, on the Israeli-occupied West Bank of Jordan. Service with the Quakers was accepted as suitable by the draft board, and off he went.

"I could hardly believe what was being done to the Palestinians on the West Bank," Mr. Kellum says. "They were being deported, their land was being taken, their houses were being blown up. What was so amazing to me was that we had not been reading about these things in the United States. And when I wrote to my parents describing things I had seen myself, they were surprised too. They certainly hadn't learned about it from the newspapers back in Indiana."

After Mr. Kellum returned to the U.S. and got his M.S. at Ohio, he spent four years teaching math and chemistry at a school in Pennsylvania, but couldn't get the Middle East out of his mind. He became involved in some Middle East-related activities after being asked to join the board of the National Council of Churches—which in 1975 made him an editor of its weekly Middle East newsletter SWASIA. Mr. Kellum was in charge of writing a weekly summary of Middle East events. It was his first exposure to journalism, and he has never looked back. After SWASIA closed down for financial reasons, he started up *The Mideast Observer* under his own power.

"I think it is needed more than ever, right now," he says. "It's almost as though Congressmen had forgotten the invasion of Lebanon, the siege of West Beirut, the massacres and so forth. Congressmen as a whole are now showing more favoritism towards Israel than they were before the invasion. I think they're lagging behind public opinion in this respect, and that their constituents should learn exactly what they're doing."

<https://www.wrmea.org/1983-august-8/personality-allan-c.-kellum.html>